

VZCZCXRO7639

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHBW #1086/01 2130711
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 010711Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1268
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 001086

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

EUR/PPD RCABRAL; EUR/SCE DAVID SCHROEDER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [SCUL](#) [SR](#) [MW](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONWIDE MEDIA APPEARANCES IN SERBIA BY
OUTGOING AMBASSADOR MICHAEL C. POLT

¶1. Summary: From July 17-26 outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Serbia Michael C. Polt conducted a series of interviews with a broad spectrum of Serbian media in which he forcefully conveyed messages on U.S. ambitions for Kosovo, Serbia and the region. The Ambassador reiterated that the U.S. supports supervised independence for Kosovo and a Serbia fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community. The interviews reached huge numbers of the viewing and reading public in Serbia, ensuring that critical USG messages, especially on Kosovo and future bilateral relations, could not be misinterpreted. End Summary.

¶2. During his last weeks at post, Ambassador Polt gave a series of interviews to a spectrum of Serbian media outlets, including local Radio Velika Plana, Vojvodina-based daily Gradjanski List, wide circulation Belgrade daily Blic, wire service BETA, national broadcaster TV B92 and influential daily Danas. Excerpts of the interviews were subsequently carried by other Serbian print media and news agencies (RTS, TV Pink, TV Avala, TV Vojvodina, Politika, Vecernje Novosti, Blic, Kurir, Dana, etc) ensuring that the Ambassador's message of the need for a final resolution on Kosovo and a future path towards integration with the West for Serbia was multiplied many times over. Highlights of the coverage follow.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

¶3. In an extensive interview with Novi Sad-based daily Gradjanski List titled "People are More Important than a Piece of Land," Ambassador Polt explained that Kosovo is not a precedent that will trigger a domino effect in other breakaway regions throughout the world and stressed that Kosovo is a unique case. He stated that he very much respected the significance Serbia attaches to Kosovo in historical and religious terms as well as in the context of the nation's ancestral heritage. He also said that the unresolved status of Kosovo prevents Serbia, Kosovo and the entire region from making progress. Ambassador Polt reiterated that he hopes Kosovo will have the status of supervised independence by the end of the year and assessed that such an outcome will lead to a stronger and more successful Serbia, fully integrated in the Euro-Atlantic family of nations. He added that Russia's backing of the Serbian government's position on Kosovo did not contribute to reaching an agreement.

¶4. In a farewell interview with daily Blic, Ambassador Polt described his mandate in Serbia as

"intensive." The daily wrote that the Ambassador said a new resolution on Kosovo is not possible in the UNSC because Russia, on behalf of Serbia, has blocked the process in spite of many offered draft resolutions. "Kosovo's status has to be resolved and if that is not possible within the UNSC, we will find another way to reach a solution," said the Ambassador.

15. In an interview with BETA news agency that was also carried by RTS, Fox, TV stations Kosava, Pink and Avala and dailies Politika, Vecernje Novosti and Kurir, Ambassador Polt said that the U.S. will work with the EU and Russia, if the latter wants to cooperate, to ensure that after 120 days of negotiation Kosovo status will be resolved. The U.S. believes that independence is the best solution for Kosovo and intends to see it implemented, if not through a UNSC resolution, then in some other way, the Ambassador told BETA, adding that even though the U.S. backs independence, it does not agree with Kosovo unilaterally declaring independence.

16. In his farewell interview with TV B92, aired during prime time on July 26, Ambassador Polt said that the upcoming negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina would be the final phase in determining the future status of Kosovo. The Ambassador said that while he had no high hopes for making any significant progress, but that we should give the negotiations one more try before wrapping up the process. "Kosovo's status will be resolved in one way or another," the Ambassador stated, adding that the U.S. continues to insist that independence is the best solution for Kosovo. Ambassador Polt said he would upgrade bilateral relations at the end of his ambassadorial term as "B+" from the U.S. side. He

BELGRADE 00001086 002 OF 002

stated that the GOS would no doubt give a lower grade," but added that Washington was striving to make the grade an "A."

17. On July 27, Ambassador Polt visited editors and journalists of Belgrade daily Danas. The Ambassador, in his last public appearance in Serbia, said that he is still an optimist regarding Serbia's future as a productive member of Euro-Atlantic organizations. He also said that he was the "luckiest ambassador" because he had had an opportunity to work with an excellent team in the Embassy Belgrade and to meet many average citizens across Serbia.

18. Daily Danas last week published an op-ed by columnist Natasa Odalovic who in an interesting and positive way described why she is sorry that Ambassador Polt is departing. Odalovic saw the Ambassador "as rare among ambassadors who had difficult dealings with the government but who made himself very available to the media, and elegantly refused to underestimate the intelligence or hurt the feelings of the average citizen of Serbia."

19. Comment: Ambassador Polt's "farewell statements" received significant media coverage in Serbia. The message clearly picked up by the local media is that while the U.S. agreed to the resumption of negotiations on the future status of Kosovo, the U.S. position on independence had not changed. The Ambassador repeatedly stated that "the U.S. is a friend, not an enemy of Serbia" despite its disagreements on the Kosovo issue. The Ambassador's messages strongly reflected and repeated recent statements by President Bush, the Secretary, U/S Burns, A/S Fried and other senior USG officials on Kosovo's status and U.S.-Serbia relations. Nonetheless, the Serbian media and the general public

continue to cling to their emotional understanding of the Kosovo issue ("K-Albanians are trying to rob Serbia of 15% of its territory with the help of the Americans.") We will therefore continue public outreach efforts with optimistic and future-oriented messages

POLT